

A Balkan-Aegean-Anatolian Glyptic Koine in the Neolithic and EBA Periods

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Abbreviations

The references to excavation reports in the footnotes are, I hope, self-explanatory, abbreviations here follow the standards established by the AJA 90 (1986) 381-394. The plain citation of Roman numerals followed by Arabic numerals refers to the volumes, fascicles, and catalogued seals in the *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel* (= CMS; Berlin 1964 ff.); e.g., II 1.243 refers to seal number 243 in fascicle 1 of CMS vol. II. Numbers preceded by the letter M (e.g., M 249) refer to the catalogue in Makkay's Early Stamp Seals in South-East Europe (Akadémiai Kiadó; Budapest, 1984).

Text

After a long absence, I have begun turning my attention once more to the seals and other decorated stamps of the Neolithic, Early, and Middle Bronze Ages in the Aegean. In doing so, I think it is valuable to consider equally the products of the Mainland, Crete, and the Islands for three major reasons:

- 1) There are distinct differences between the seals of these three regions, differences of seal-shape, iconography, and style; for instance, the quadripartite designs of the Lerna sealings and the concentric circles of the Cycladic seal impressions.
- 2) Though there are indeed these distinct differences in the seals from the three regions, there are also many instances where seal shapes, motifs, and styles are shared between regions, either by influence or by actual importing of seals; for instance, the considerable number of quadripartite motifs found both at Lerna and on contemporary (or nearly contemporary) seals from the Messara.
- 3) And, in comparing seals from all three regions, it becomes obvious, on the other hand, that many seem extraordinarily different -- they do not conform to the majority of a region's seals in shape, iconography, and style; for instance, the clay stamp seals and linear designs impressed on pithoi by cylinders from Lerna (e.g., V 135 from Lerna III, 130 from Lerna IV, 144 from Lerna V) and from Tiryns (e.g., V 566).

It is this last observation that has prompted this brief study; and to clarify this observation it will be profitable to look beyond the Peloponnese, Cyclades, and Crete and to consider seals

from the regions to the north and east of the Aegean and which are both predecessors to and contemporaries of their Aegean counterparts.

The publications of Anatolian and Syrian sites have been available for some time, but J. Makkay's recently published book, *Early Stamp Seals in South-East Europe*, assembles the corpus of Neolithic and Chalcolithic stone and clay seals from Central Europe, the Balkans, northern Greece, and western Anatolia, describes them, and illustrates 90% of them -- an extremely informative and useful book. And thanks to this slim volume and to other studies we can frame, as it were, Aegean glyptic with the seals and stamps from the north and the east. The results of even a casual glance at this material are interesting.

Most scholars have been impressed by the almost unique character of Aegean glyptic; it differs from the Near-Eastern art-form, as if self-consciously, in shape, style, and iconography.

Extremely few Aegean seals have traveled outside the Aegean. If Yule's Small Plate/Chip-Cut Group, (P. Yule, *Early Cretan Seals: A Study of Chronology*, 207-208), is indeed Minoan, which may be doubted, a member of it impressed a jar stopper from EB III Tarsus (*Tarsus* 241, fig. 398); since the publication does not make clear whether the clay of the jar stopper is local, it is possible that the jar already stoppered and impressed was imported or that the stamp was imported and impressed a locally stoppered jar.

The remaining 24 Aegean seals that traveled outside Greece all date to the Late Bronze Age:

From Turkey: three lentoids (one is published in *AJA* 89, 1985, 552-3 and 558 fig. 1, pl. 61.2) and a bone rectangular plate seal, all from Besiktepe; and another lentoid in the Bodrum Museum from the Kas shipwreck (Bass, *AJA* 90, 1986, 283-4 fig. 20, pl. 17.2). *Cretan Seals* no. 375, a forgery, is said to come from Smyrna.

From Cyprus: VII 48, 126, and 168; and IX 162 a lapis lazuli cushion set in a gold cup from Lnkomi T. 1.

From "Syria": VII 33 and *Cretan Seals* no. 56 are both "from the coast of Syria"; X 268 was bought in Beirut; and IX 156 was "found near Antioch".

From northern Mesopotamia: a lentoid once thought to be Aegean comes from the excavations at Tell Brak (Amiran, *Iraq* 18, 1956, 57-59).

From Palestine: Rockefeller Museum IDAM 34.329 a glass lentoid, comes from Tell Abu Hawam (LH III A2B context; CMS V Supp. 1B 471); and *Cretan Seals* nos. 31P-38P were all "discovered on the coast of Palestine near Gaza".

From Egypt: *Cretan Seals* no. 330 was "found in Egypt" and accessed into the AM in 1873; and *Cretan Seals* no. 39P was "purchased at Abu Tig, Egypt" and accessed into the AM in 1892.

From Libya: a lentoid was excavated at Tocra (CMS V Supp. 1B 472).

No Aegean seals come from the western Mediterranean: VII 160 is said to have been found in Calabria, Italy, but may instead have come from Biliotti's excavations at Ialysos in Rhodes (Younger, *Papers in Cycladic Prehistory* 97-105) and a lentoid now in the Villa Giulia (CMS XI 290) was once erroneously thought to have come from an Etruscan tomb at Orvieto.

A slightly larger number but still relatively few Near-Eastern and Egyptian seals have been found within the Aegean. These include the imported cylinders already noted by Buchholz ("XII. The Cylinder Seal" in G. Bass, ed., *Cape Gelidonya* TAPS 57.8, 1967, 148-159) and the occasional, re-engraved scarab such as V 424.

We also note the EH II hearth rim from Ayia Irini in Kea (V 479) that was impressed by a stamp that imitated Egyptian hieroglyphics and added a pun, substituting the common Helladic sauceboat for an Egyptian vase hieroglyph.

When we remove these references to foreign seal shapes and designs we like to think that we then have a purely Aegean corpus of seals, but how much of it actually derives from a cultural tradition that is geographically and ethnically larger? When we look at the pintaderas from Neolithic sites in Central Europe, the Balkans, northern Greece, and Anatolia and at the seals and stamps from Early Bronze Age sites in the Aegean, in Anatolia, and in the Near East we find contemporary shapes and designs that are common to all these regions; they may be said to participate in a "koinê" of shapes and designs.

Preliminary results shed light in four major areas:

I. A few koinê patterns are represented in the Aegean by only one or two examples, for instance:

Zig-zags (Fig. 1), short, multiple, and parallel, on stamp seals with circular or oval faces:

LN -- Central Europe: M 249 (Hungary); Balkans: M 38 & 39 (Romania)

EB II -- Ilios 415 no. 494 (Troy III); Tarsus fig. 395.38.1717, 47.104, and 47.106

MB late context -- V 480 from Ayia Irini in Kea

Unstratified -- HMP 4806, an impressed loomweight from Palaikastro (BSA 1939-40, 49 no. 37, fig. 38)

Summary: zig-zags, short, multiple, and parallel, on stamp seals with circular or oval faces may have started in the LN Balkans; by EB II there is a stamp at Troy, and an impressed loomweight at both Palaikastro and Tarsus; a later and stylized (MC?) impressed rim comes from Ayia Irini in Kea.

II. Some koinê patterns and shapes are represented by a limited number of Aegean examples, for instance:

Foot amulets (Fig. 2)

EN

Balkans -- M 89 (Romania, zig-zags)

Greece -- V 722 from Nessonis (zig-zags)

Syria -- Byblos V fig. 52 no. 33119 (stone with simple hatching; cf. the unstratified example from Tarsus fig. 39337.231 and the one in the Univ. of Missouri, Columbia Mus. (Muse 9, 1975, 8-9)

LN -- M 20 (Bulgaria, no design)

EM II -- II 1.212 from Lebena and 407 from Krassi, with hatching

EB III -- Tarsus fig. 393.38.442 with parallel grooves

Summary: foot amulets seem to originate in the Early Neolithic period from Romania, through northern Greece, to Byblos; by EM II they are common enough in the Mesara tholoi, but do not seem to have found favor in the Middle Bronze Age anywhere. For major studies of foot amulets, see: K Branigan, "Minoan Foot Amulets and their Near Eastern Counterparts", *SMEA* 11 (1970) 7-23; and I. Pini, "Weitere Bemerkungen zu den minoischen Fussamuletten", *SMEA* 15 (1972) 179-188.

Holes/Bosses (Fig. 3)

EN

Balkans -- M 182 (Hungary)

Greece -- V 698-700 from Nea Nikomedia, all TC

MN

Balkans -- M 189 & 190 (Yugoslavia)

Greece -- I 1 from Sesklo

LN

Balkans -- M 213 (Bulgaria)

Syria -- Byblos V 166-168 fig. 110, nos. 32125, 32065, 34862, 30370, 32482, all

stone

Chalcolithic- EBA

Central Europe -- M 241 (Hungary)

Syria -- Byblos V 326-9 fig. 200 no.30912 and pl. clxiv no. 28423

EH III and later

Greece -- **V Supp. 1B** Sparta Mus. HS 278 from Ayios Stephanos (BSA 67, 1972, 247 pl. 51h)

Anatolia -- Ilios no. 1340 from Troy V

Summary: stamps with holes in the faces may have begun as counters; they appear in the Balkans and north Greece as early as the EN period and become common at Byblos by the LN period. Early Bronze Age Greece, however, has produced few examples; the completely perforated clay stamp from Ayios Stephanos is unique. The motif may be related to the later seals with many concentric circles, which are common in three distinct periods in the Aegean: in Crete ca. 1700 B.C. and ca. 1500 B.C. in the Cretan Popular Group, and on the Mainland ca. 1325 B.C. in the Mainland Popular Group.

Lines on Cylinders (Fig. 4)

LN

Balkans -- M 139, 140, and 142-144 (Albania); M 274 (Yugoslavia); and M 21 (Bulgaria)
 Greece -- V 633-6 and M 232 from Sitagroi Phase Vb; and M 50 from Dikeli Tas
 Chalcolithic -- EBA
 Anatolia -- Alishar Huyuk 1928-9, 1834 fig. 186
 Greece -- II 2.7 from Kamilari
 EBA II
 Zig-zags, etc.
 Greece -- V 136, an impressed pithos band from Lerna; V 546, 549, 551 etc.,
 impressed pithoi from Tiryns (e.g., V 566)
 N.Syria: Coll. Borowski (*Kunst der Kykladen* no. 454)
 EH III and later
 Anatolia -- Troy III 298 fig. 296 no. 35478 from a Troy VI context; *Tarsus* fig. 393, 2
 faience cylinders; fig. 397, pots impressed by a cylinder
 Greece -- V 485 from Kea (MB IIb-III context; **Fig. 5**); impressed pithoi from Lerna

Summary: lines on cylinders appear in the 4th millenium from the Balkans, through north Greece, and into the Near East. The example from Alishar Huyuk seems so close to the one from the Kamilari tholos in Crete that the latter may be an import. The popularity of EH II and III pithoi bands from the Argolid impressed by similar cylinders is startling. One such cylinder, a stamp-cylinder, has survived from Kea.

III. Two koinê designs occur commonly in the Aegean, the spiral and the chevroned cross, both of which have received much scholarly attention.

Spirals (Fig. 6)

EN
 Simple -- M 295 (Bulgaria)
 Greece -- V 696 and 697 from Nea Nikomedia
 Double
 Greece -- V 695 from Nea Nikomedia
 Retorted
 Anatolia -- Catal Huyuk (Mellaart, AS 14, 1964, 39119, fig. 41.1 and 9)
 EN-MN
 S-shaped -- M 269 (Yugoslavia)
 Simple
 Balkans -- M 129 & 130 (Albania, 25-7, 29-33, 71, 72, 87, 88, 90, 180, 207, 278 (Romania); and 10, 146, and 211 (Bulgaria)
 Retorted
 Stamps
 Balkans -- M 138 (Albania); and 68-70 and 293 (Romania)
 Cylinders
 Balkans -- M 142 (Albania)
 S-Spirals
 Balkans -- M 248 (Bulgaria); and 23 and 59 (Romania)

EB II

Simple

Greece- V 456, etc., hearth impressions from Kea; stamped Frying Pans

Anatolia -- Tarsus 240 r.g. 395.5

Retorted

Stamps

Greece -- V 529, an impressed pithos from Tiryns; hearth impressions from

Kea

Cylinders -- V 530-533, impressed pithoi from Tiryns

S-Spirals Greece -- V 101, sealing from Lerna; V 5347, impressed pithoi from Tiryns

J-Spirals/Quirks

Greece -- V 102, sealing from Lerna; V 461, hearth impression from Kea

Anatolia -- Karatas (Mellink, AJA 76, 1972, 259, pl. 55.5)

EH III or later

Retorted on cylinders from Lerna -- V 121, impressed pithos

Summary: spirals are attested from the EN period on in several forms seemingly throughout the area, simple, double, retorted, and S-spirals. By the EB II we get J-spirals and quirks on sealings and impressed pottery in the Argolid and even at Karatas, perhaps exported; at this time, spirals their variants, and their abbreviated forms seem more restricted to the Aegean; in EH II-III there are impressed pithoi and sealings from the Argolid, impressed hearth rims from Kea, and in EM II-MM I there are bone stamp-cylinders from Crete and numerous other examples. Thereafter, spirals rarely constitute the main motif (but see X 203). For major studies on early spirals, see: F. Matz, *Die Fruhkrertchen Siegel* (Berlin 1928) and V. Milojevic, "Zur Frage der Herkunft des Maanders und der Spirale bei der Band Keramik Mitteleuropas", *JRGZM* 11 (1964)

Chevroned Cross (Fig. 7)

EN (Prototype)

Balkans -- M 97 (Hungary)

Anatolia -- Hacilar, Mellaart 164 fig. 187.7

EN-MN

Greece -- I 3 from Sesklo; and V 721 from Tsani Magoula (prototype or related design)

Syria -- Byblos V 125-126, fig. 76 no. 29564

LN

Balkans -- M 118 (Hungary); M 195 (Yugoslavia); and M 210 (Bulgaria)

Chalcolithic -- EBA

Central Europe -- M 282 (Czechoslovakia)

Balkans -- M 118 (Hungary)

Anatolia -- Alishar Huyuk 1930-32 81 fig. 87 (c481 TC; e1909 stone; e1481 bronze; e576 lead)

Syria -- Byblos V 326-329 fig. 202 nos. 22987 & 33808

EB II

Greece -- V 48, a sealing from Lerna; V 52, a stamped jar handle from Lerna; V 470 (Fig. 8), etc., stamped hearth rims from Kea

Anatolia -- Karatas (Mellink, AJA 71, 1967, 264 pl. 84.55 no. KA 372; compare KZ 111, 128, 131, 398, 399, 418); Tarsus 232 fig. 392.7

EB III or later

Greece -- V 486 from Kea; V 518 from Poliochni

Anatolia -- Ilios no. 1212 from Troy IV; Tarsus fig. 393.27 (MB context)

Summary: the Chevroned Cross is without a doubt the koinê motif with the widest geographic appeal. Crude prototypes are attested first in the EN Balkans and at Hacilar. By the MN period, the motif is found fully developed from the Balkans, through north Greece and Anatolia, to Byblos. In the Early Bronze Age, however, the motif seems restricted to the Aegean basin, like the spiral, although there is one stamp from Tarsus in a MBA context. The motif is common amongst the EH II sealings in the Argolid and the impressed hearth rims at Kea, and on contemporary and perhaps slightly later seals; by the time of the Phaistos sealings, however, the design is overshadowed by other and more complicated hatched motifs. For a major study on chevroned crosses, see V.E.G. Kenna, "Two Ancient Trade Routes," AAA 1 (1968) 278-280.

IV. Two other primary motifs seem restricted to the Balkans and the Aegean:

Zig-Zags/Kerbschnitt (Fig. 9)

EN

Single

Balkans -- M 296 (Bulgaria)

Greece -- V 701-704 from Nea Nikomedia, and 712 from Sesklo

Multiple

Balkans- the foot amulet M 89 (Romania); and the stamps M 54, 55, 94, 124, 125, 272, 304 (Hungary); 76, 203 and 279 (Yugoslavia); 178 and 283 (Romania); and 12-15, 35, 37 and 119 (Bulgaria)

Greece -- the foot amulet V 722 from Nessonis; V 694 and 705-709 from Nea Nikomedia; and V 715 from Argissa, all TC

Chalcolithic-EBA

Balkans -- M 112 (Albania)

Greece -- V 449 from Dikili Tas (Neolithic-Chalcolithic)

EB II Greece -- hearth rims with Kerbschnitt and pithoi impressed by cylinders from Lerna (e.g., V 149), Kea (**Fig. 10**), Phaistos, etc.

Summary: Zig-zags/Kerbschnitt form one of the most common designs in the Aegean. They appear as early as the Early Neolithic period and as a main motif Kerbschnitt seems to run its course by the end of the Early Bronze Age (for instance as the border design for hearths from Lerna, Kea, and Phaistos); zig-zags, however, appear from time to time thereafter, even into the modern period, as filling motifs, on pottery and in architecture, and on modern wooden stamps for printing cloth.

Concentric Circles (Fig. 11)

EN-MN

Balkans -- M 237 (Hungary; diamonds)
 Greece -- M 176 from Nessonis
 MN
 Balkans -- M 192 (Yugoslavia)
 Greece -- V 301 and 715 from Sesklo
 LN
 Balkans -- M 22 (Czechoslovakia); 128 (Albania); 117, 120, 208 and 212 (Bulgaria);
 and 42 (Romania)
 Greece -- V 681 from Eutresis (diamonds)
 Chalcolithic -- EBA
 Balkans -- M 280 (Bulgaria)
 Syria -- Byblos V 326-9 fig. 200 no. 21959 (is this an import from the Aegean?)
 EB II Greece -- V 451 (**Fig. 12**), etc., hearth impressions from Kea; V 540, etc.,
 impressed pithoi from Tiryns; cf. Frying Pan impressions, etc.

Summary: a single set of concentric circles constitutes another extremely popular primary motif from the Early or Middle Neolithic through the Early Bronze Age, again seemingly restricted to the Balkans and the Aegean (one clay stamp comes from Byblos, perhaps imported). In the Aegean, we tend to think of concentric circles as a Cycladic feature, although there are pithoi from Tiryns impressed with this motif; more commonly, however, sets of concentric circles decorate Frying Pans and many hearth rims from Kea. In the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, several small sets of concentric circles will decorate seal faces, but a single set no longer appears.

Conclusions

This glance at the early stamps, seals, and seal impressions in and outside the Aegean suggests that the simple designs of lines, zig-zags, spirals, and concentric circles and the simple stamp shapes as well as foot-amulets all had a broad popular appeal from the Balkans to Syria, including the Aegean; it may be convenient to imagine that these motifs and shapes shared in a common cultural aesthetic which was always accessible to a large group of people for a long period of time, even up to the modern day. That such common designs and simple shapes lay in the cultural heritage of many distinct peoples is not, of course a very surprising or interesting conclusion.

But the corollary is comforting, for it implies that, while simple linear designs had developed in the Neolithic period for imprinting cloth, decorating pottery, or for staining the flesh, the complicated and symmetrical motifs, like the quadripartite motifs of Lerna, constitute a special development in the Early Bronze Age, perhaps in response to the introduction of bureaucratic sealing practices from the Near East. It certainly seems logical that such a new institution would indeed call for more formal and distinctive patterns than the simple linear ones used for decorating utensils and the person.

The act of sealing, however, need not have been, of course, a purely Argolidic practice in the EB II period; there is the one extant sealing from EM II Myrtos, although it must be

cautioned that one sealing at Myrtos need not a Cretan bureaucracy make, especially since the motif on the Myrtos sealing carries the international chevroned cross.

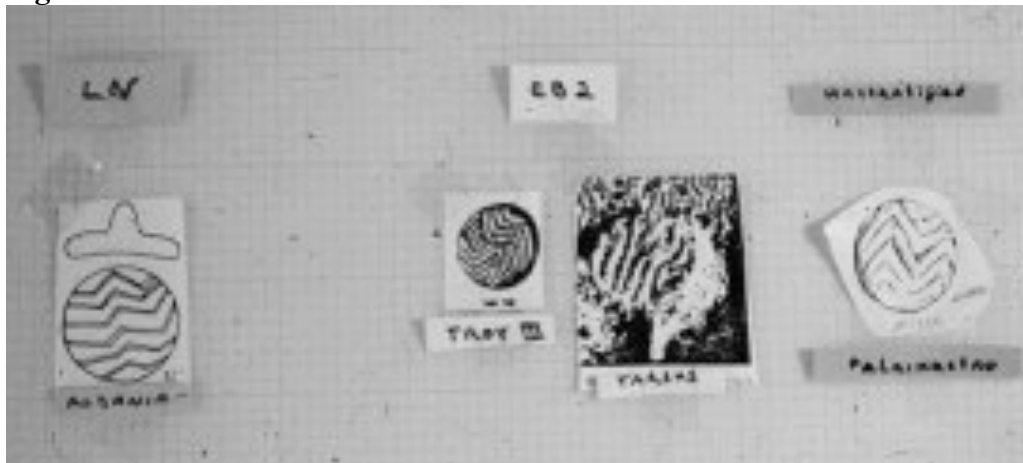
If this hypothesis, that new bureaucratic practices called for new designs, is correct, then one would not expect terracotta stamp seals with simple linear designs to have been used in the bureaucratic House of the Tiles, and indeed they have not been found there; only one such linear design is associated sphragistically with the House of the Tiles: the sealing V 48, which carries the international chevroned cross. Some pithoi bands impressed by cylinders with linear patterns do come from the House of the Tiles, but they seem to reflect a decorative, not a sphragistic practice.

Instead, the terracotta stamps that are found at Lerna come from the later Lerna IV; their presence at the site indicates that, even after the conflagration that destroyed the House of the Tiles and baked the sealings therein, the people maintained into the next period the long tradition of stamping and decorating objects and the flesh too. And if the absence of such stamps in the earlier Lerna III implies that sphragistic seals supplanted the decorative seals, then the presence of the decorative seals in Lerna IV may imply that bureaucratic sealing was then no longer practiced.

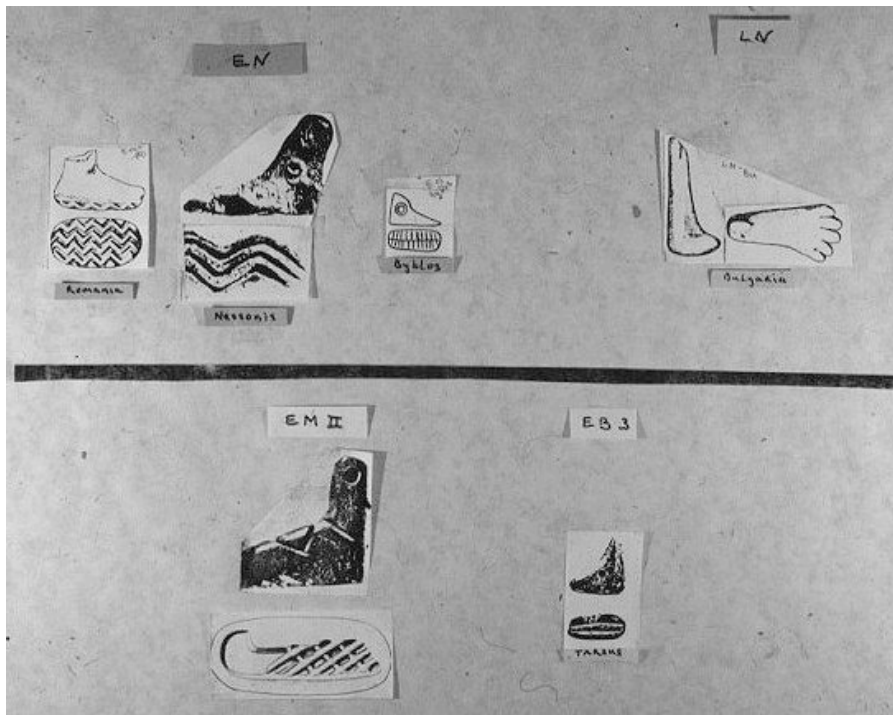
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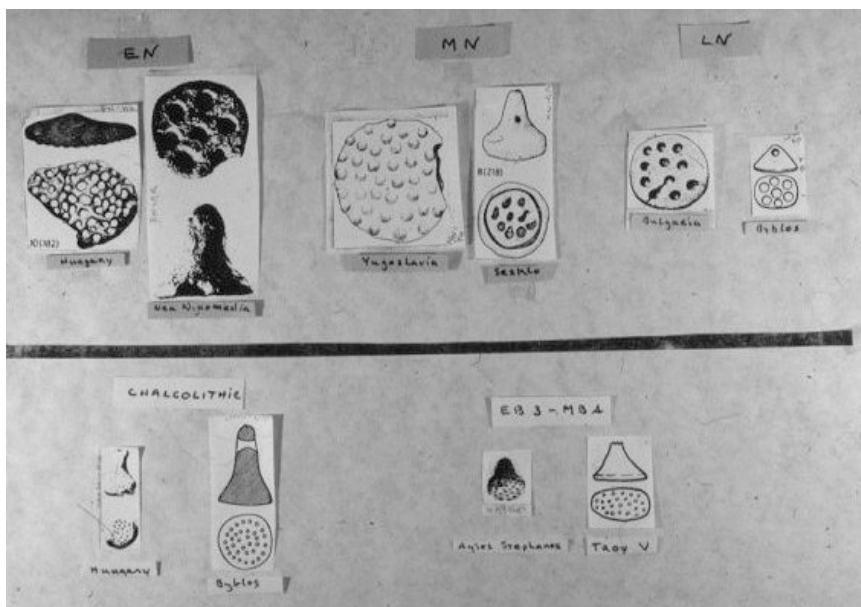
Figures



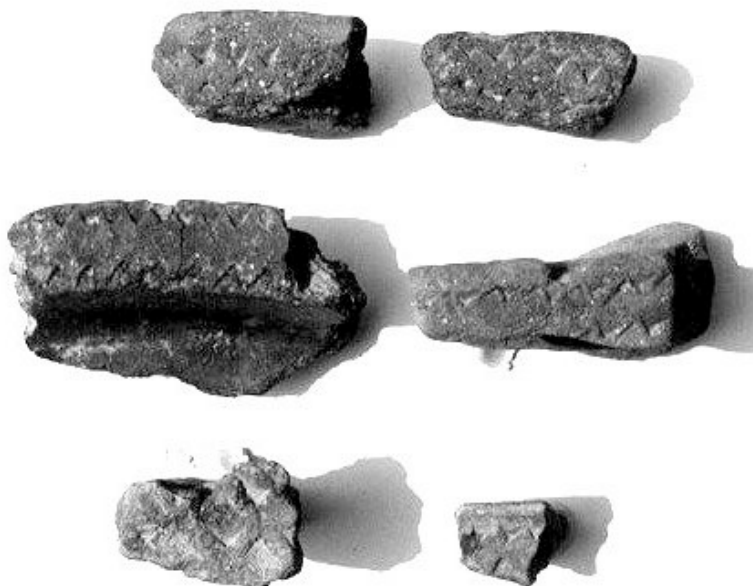
1. Zig-zags, short, multiple, and parallel, on stamp seals with circular or oval faces.



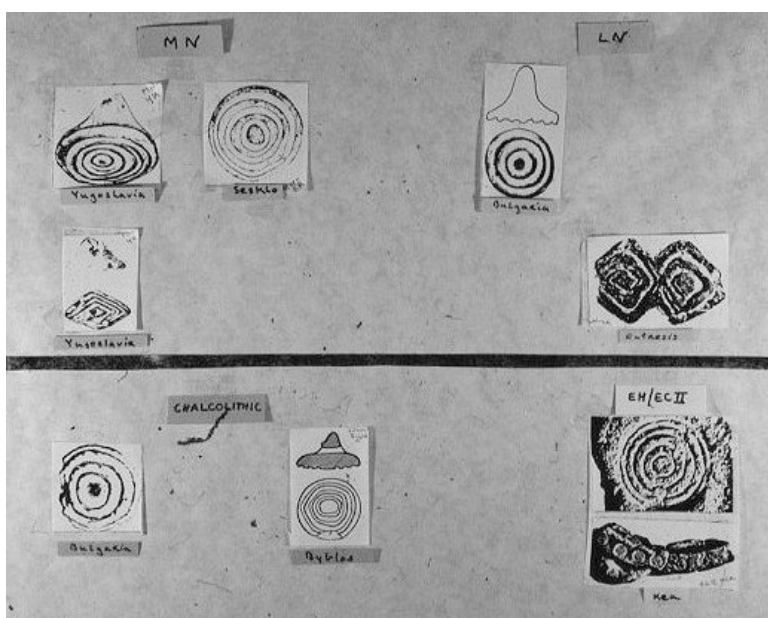
2. Foot amulets.



3. Holes/Bosses.



10. Hearth rims from Ayia Irini, with Kerbschnitt



11. Concentric Circles



12. CMS V 451 from Ayia Irini, Kea